



The benefits of planting trees

In the first 6 months of this year, Discover colleagues in Africa planted over 30,000 trees– a remarkable achievement! Well done!

Planting trees and practising agroforestry helps to combat the worst effects of the climate crisis – we already know that very well. Trees and ground cover help the earth to remain moist, even during periods of drought. Then by torrential rains, the tree canopy softens the force, and the root network allows the water to soak into the ground.

The roots of trees planted on steep slopes bind the earth and prevent landslips. Bamboo strengthens the riverbanks and thus helps to prevent flooding and the riverbeds from becoming even wider.

Trees and vegetables planted together help to maintain soil fertility and provide a bigger total harvest, thus contributing to health and well-being.

I asked some Discover colleagues if their communities enjoy other benefits from planting trees and practising agroforestry. I was overwhelmed by their immediate and enthusiastic responses. Some said that the benefits are many more than they ever expected!

- Through practising agroforestry, families and communities are working more closely together and a good team spirit has developed. When challenges occur, people support each other to seek a solution.
- The harvest of fruits and vegetables contributes enormously to health and nutrition – especially in children.
- A major change in mindset is slowly taking place. Valuable trees were formally felled for making charcoal for quick profit. Today older trees are being protected and seedlings are being planted as a longer-term source of income.
- In many areas, due to the growing population, conflicts over land are commonplace. Trees planted along the agreed boundaries have significantly reduced such conflicts.
- Keeping animals is also an essential aspect of agroforestry, which also contributes significantly to the increased well-being of farming families. This has not only resulted in fewer people leaving for the town, but also some people who previously left for the towns are now returning. They see that practising agroforestry in their village gives a better standard of living than the precarious existence in the towns.
- Formally women had to walk long distances to collect firewood, which they then carried home



in heavy loads on their heads. Today they cut the side branches of the trees on their farms and can sometimes even sell the surplus branches from the house door.

- People are identifying new sources of income. Firstly, by keeping bees. The honey produced also contributes to the good health of the family. Secondly, by collecting seeds, especially of indigenous tree species and fruit trees,
- Indigenous trees that were threatened with extinction are now being planted in significant numbers. For example (in Uganda) *Warburgia ugandensis* and *Prunus africana*.
- Many trees and plants have medicinal properties. *Warburgia ugandensis* treats cough and even malaria. The unripe fruits of *Carica papaya* can be used to dress septic wounds.



- As the number and diversity of trees and plants increases, so does the overall biodiversity. An increased number of insects, butterflies, birds (even the beautiful little bee-eater in the picture) and small animals such as lizards and chameleons can be seen.

- In northwest Uganda conflicts between clans occur frequently. Following skilful and patient mediation, two clans, which, over decades, had been antagonistic, have reconciled. This amazing, new-found peace is being cemented by members of the two clans planting shea butter seedlings together and working together to ensure that no more mature shea butter trees are felled for making charcoal.
- Lastly, and very importantly, hundreds, if not thousands, of children are benefitting from tree-planting. Some Discover colleagues are themselves schoolteachers. The benefits are enormous! Firstly, both pupils and teachers have fun as they plant and care for trees. Secondly, they benefit from the vegetables and the fruits of the trees in their school gardens. Perhaps most importantly, they too develop a new mindset; they learn the importance of trees and of nature. The conventional view that they must work hard to get a good job in an office gives way to the possibility of a good life on the land. Whatever they do in the future, they have learned invaluable life skills.



It is not only the children who enjoy such a sense of excitement! A teacher colleague said, "It's awesome to see a tiny seedling growing bigger and bigger!" This newsletter reflects the excitement of many others!

Keep up this brilliant work! If you are not already growing trees, please start now!

Keith Lindsey